

ST. PETER'S COLLEGE, DUNBOYNE

DRAFT POLICY COPY

RESPONSE TO CRITICAL INCIDENTS

JOHN TIGHE

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this policy is to assist the school during a critical incident that might arise due to any of the following:

- The sudden death of a member of the school community from natural causes.
- The loss to life of a member of our school community following an accident, suicide or homicide on or off the school premises.
- The death of a Parent / Guardian of our school community.
- A physical attack on a member of our school community.
- An intrusion into the school causing discomfort or threat.
- Serious damage to the school through fire, flood or other man-made or natural disaster.
- The disappearance of a member of our school community.
- An accident or tragedy in our local community, including our catchment area.

Crisis Response Team

A list of the members of the Crisis Response Team (CRT) and their role will be displayed in the school staff room, the school office and the student office. The school will have a saved group-list for texting and emailing the team, made up of the following personnel

Principal

Deputy Principals

School Chaplain

Guidance Counsellor

School Counsellors

SEN Co Coordinator

Teachers, Tutors, Ceannairí and any group or body relevant to any crisis may also form part of the CRT.

Staff should get refresher training every two years to keep them up to date on their role during a critical incident.

Staff will be given a crisis response pack to assist them in the aftermath of a critical incident.

1. On School Premises Incident.

- In the event of a sudden death or suicide on school premises, a staff member should call the necessary emergency services, send for help, send for the Principal or Deputy Principal and preserve the scene.
- In the event of injury or death due to fire, staff should raise the alarm, begin clearance of the building, and contain the fire **only** if safe to do so.
- In the event of an intrusion or attack on a member of the school community, staff should call the Gardaí, and should **not** put themselves or others at risk.

2. Establish The Facts.

- Any staff member who becomes aware of a traumatic incident will notify the Principal or Deputy Principals immediately.
- The Principal / Deputy Principals should assess the situation initially and convene the CRT.
- The CRT should assess all the information available and ensure that all facts are accurate. Appointed members of the CRT should contact different agencies (e.g. hospitals, Gardaí, Parents, local Clergy as deemed necessary.
- The needs of the families and school members involved will be paramount, and their wishes will always be respected.
- All facts and delicate information will be confidential, and only the Principal or Deputy Principals will share these with the public, if and when appropriate.
- The CRT should arrange to meet on an hourly basis to continually assess the situation.

3. Immediate School Response to a Critical Incident.

- Specific tasks will be assigned to members of the CRT.
- The Principal / Deputy Principals will inform staff by convening a staff meeting during school hours or by inviting staff to school via text or email when out of school hours (**See Appendix A regarding text or Email**).
- It is important that staff members be made aware of the full facts regarding the incident and that they be reminded not to speak to any other party regarding the incident.
- The Principal / Deputy Principals will call a partial-assembly and inform the relevant group of the incident. A full school assembly should follow to inform all students of the incident. The students will be asked not to speak to reporters, share images or recordings on or with any media as a mark of respect.
- Classes should reconvene in Tutor Groups so that the Tutors can assess the needs of their students and report back to the CRT. A general statement will be made available to Tutors (**See Appendix B regarding Tutor statement**).
- The CRT will be available to the affected year group and close friends. The Counsellors and Chaplain will respond to those deemed most in need of care.

- The School Oratory will be made available where affected students can congregate and will always be accompanied by the Chaplain or Counsellor(s).
- School should continue in as normal way as possible.
- The Chaplain and Religion teachers will organise an initial short prayer service at the partial assembly and later at the whole school assembly.
- A general statement will be available for media and will be delivered by the Principal / Deputy Principal or a person appointed by them (**see Appendix C regarding media statement**).
- The Principal, the Chaplain and a Counsellor will visit the home of any families affected by the incident.
- The School Principal will contact the Chairperson of the Board of Management, the C.E.O of Louth Meath Education and Training Board and the Department of Education including NEPS. The Principal will at all times liaise with authorities at an accident scene.
- The CRT will devise a letter to be sent to parents / guardians regarding the incident. (**see Appendix D regarding statement to parents / guardians**).

4. Short Term Action

- The CRT will assess those students, staff members and parents / guardians whose needs are greatest, and will put in place whatever counselling is required. The school oratory will be made available as a place of silence and reflection, and other rooms will be made available to accommodate group therapy.
- Staff members on the CRT will be accommodated and, where possible and appropriate, freed from their timetable.
- Staff will be reminded to keep a close watch on students and to report any concerns to the Principal or a member of the CRT.
- Classes will continue unless the Principal or the Board of Management decides otherwise.
- The Principal or a person assigned by the Principal will be the only person to liaise with the media.
- The Principal / Chaplain, in consultation with the families affected, will discuss the role of the school community during any funeral/s.

5. Long Term Care.

- The school will hold a memorial service in the aftermath of a critical incident. The CRT will continue to assess the situation and identify needs on a daily basis.
- The School Chaplain and Counsellors will continue to visit the affected families and offer whatever assistance they can.
- Deceased staff and students will be remembered on religious occasions in the school.
- Funding will be made available to assist the CRT deal with any consequences of a critical incident.
- The school will assess how it dealt with the critical incident and will endeavour to make improvements where identified.

APPENDIX A

Contacting staff by text, email when an out-of-school incident occurs.

In the event of a critical incident taking place out of school term or normal school hour's the CRT should be contacted immediately via phone call. Staff will be informed via text or email. The text or email will be very short and will not give in detail the type of incident or the name(s) of any person(s) involved. The text or email message should simply read: "Please contact the school immediately due to emergency".

This message should be authorised only by the Principal / Deputy Principals or most senior manager at the time.

During school

The School Principal will organise supervision of students and call a general staff meeting. The staff will be informed about the incident and will get further instruction regarding procedures for the remainder of the school day.

APPENDIX B

Tutor statement

It is very difficult to understand what has happened today. We would like to offer our sympathies to the people involved and we remember those who died: _____.

We will light this small candle as a mark of respect, and we will have a short reflection with a moment of silence. We know that you are finding it difficult to come to terms with what has happened, and we are here to help you as much as possible. I would like to remind you that there are many services available in the school such as _____, and I would encourage you to use these.

Please remember you might be asked by reporters from the media about the incident. In order to ensure that the correct facts are transmitted, it is essential that only School Management should speak to the media. As a mark of respect we would ask you not to disclose any recordings or images or items to the media, and if you do possess any relevant recordings or images or materials relevant, please make them available to the School Principal.

During the day there will be some disruptions but it is important for us to continue with our studies. If you need any help please feel free to ask me.

Thank You.

APPENDIX C

Media statement

It is with profound sadness that the Management, Staff, Students and Parents of St. Peter's College, Dunboyne have learned of the tragic death of _____, a member of our school community.

A critical incident has occurred in St. Peter's College today. As a result of this a student(s) / teacher(s) have died.

We would like to extend our sympathies to the families of the deceased. We are unable to issue any further information at this time and we would ask that you, the media, respect the privacy of the bereaved and of our school community. We will endeavour to update you when appropriate.

The school has informed our Critical Response Team and we have put our Critical Response Plan into action.

We cannot answer questions at this time.

Thank you.

APPENDIX D

Statement to parents / guardians

Dear Parents / Guardians,

The school has experienced *the sudden death / other incident* of one of our *students / staff members*. We would like to extend our sympathies to _____.

The school has put into action our critical response plan and we would like to bring to your attention the following support structures available to students and parents / guardians.

At this time we would encourage you to talk to your children, as they may feel the need to express feelings or fears related to this tragedy. If you feel your children need further care, please do not hesitate to contact the school and we will refer them to a counsellor. We can supply you with a list of counsellors or agencies outside the school if you wish.

It is important that all the facts regarding the incident be discussed in an honest way with your children. If you are finding it difficult to discuss the incident, please contact the school where we will advise on the issue.

We would like to remind you that our school services are available at all times.

We would ask you not to speak to reporters from the media. Unreliable and unfounded information can often cause distress to friends and families bereaved. Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

Yours,

APPENDIX E

Letter to parents / guardians regarding long-term care

Dear Parents / Guardians,

Following the recent critical incident in our school, we have now put in place long-term support structures for your children. Some supports will be at an individual level and others in small-group form. If you feel your child is in need of support, please contact us and we will discuss which better suits the needs of your child.

If you feel unsure about the effect this incident has had on your child, please feel free to telephone or come into the school and make an appointment to meet one of our care team.

Thank You;

APPENDIX E

The role of the Principal

- Establish the facts: Who? What? Where? When? How? etc.
- Contact appropriate agencies.
- Organise supervision; convene the CRT; call a staff meeting.
- Agree a statement of facts.
- Agree statements for media, and appoint different personnel duties.
- Inform the year group(s) relevant.
- Identify high-risk students.
- Call a whole-school assembly.
- Organise a timetable for the day.
- Inform Parents / Guardians.
- Visit the bereaved families.
- Respond to media.
- Meet with the CRT on a regular basis to update information.
- Maintain as normal a school day as possible.
- Decide if and when and for how long the school should close.